



Strengthening the human capital of forcibly displaced persons in and from Ukraine: Background note for the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2024

11 June 2024

Key messages

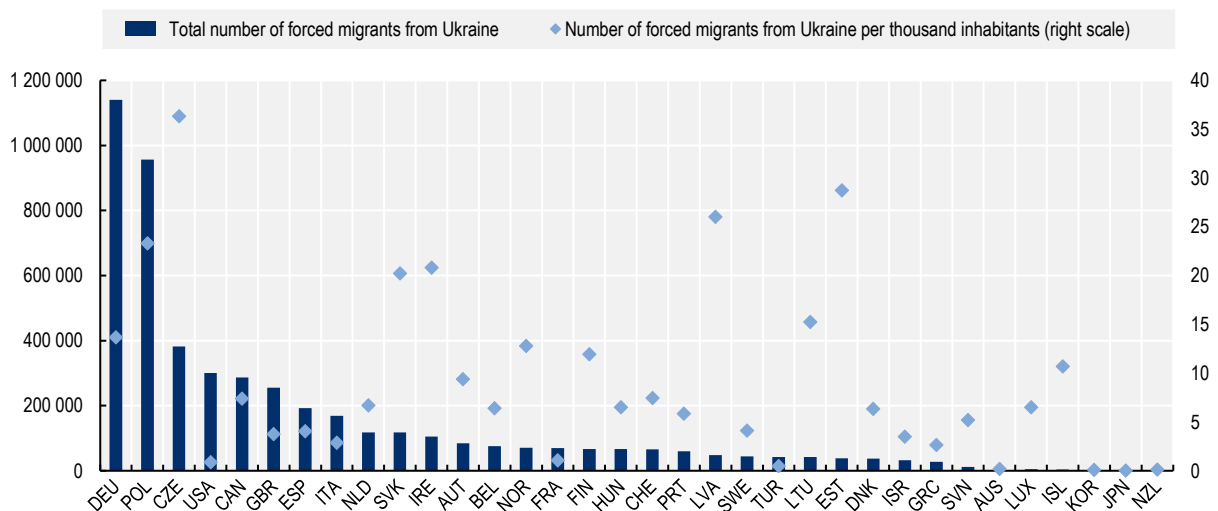
- Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine has caused Europe's largest displacement crisis since World War II. As of April 2024, there were 3.5 million officially registered internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine, in addition to 1.4 million IDPs registered prior to February 2022, with further 4.9 million Ukrainians displaced abroad in OECD countries alone.
- The profiles of internally and externally displaced Ukrainians differ in terms of gender and age: there are more women and children among the externally displaced, while the elderly make up a larger share of the internally displaced (28% compared to 4-6% among those abroad). Externally displaced also have higher levels of education as compared to Ukrainians in Ukraine, and to host country populations.
- Displaced Ukrainians generally have lower employment levels than those observed in host communities, and face skill mismatches. This raises concerns about underutilisation and degradation of their human capital. This has led Ukraine, host states, social partners and other actors to implement measures to help displaced persons retain, use, and develop their skills.
- Current efforts to boost the human capital of displaced Ukrainians are diverse and could benefit from scaling up, enhancing sustainability, sharing information, improving access, as well as increasing stakeholder co-ordination and co-operation.

Who are the forcibly displaced persons in Ukraine and abroad?

Since the start of Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, more than 10 million people have been displaced, either within Ukraine or abroad. While some have managed to return to their places of origin, many have not. As of April 2024, there were 3.5 million officially registered internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine, in addition to 1.4 million IDPs registered prior to February 2022 (Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, 2024^[1]). Over 80% have been displaced for more than a year (IOM, 2023^[2]). Most IDPs are located in Dnipropetrovska (458 066), Kharkivska (521 445) and Donetska (547 988) oblasts, as well as in Kyiv City (409 195). Moreover, it is estimated that there are additional 2 million non-registered IDPs (Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, 2024^[3]).

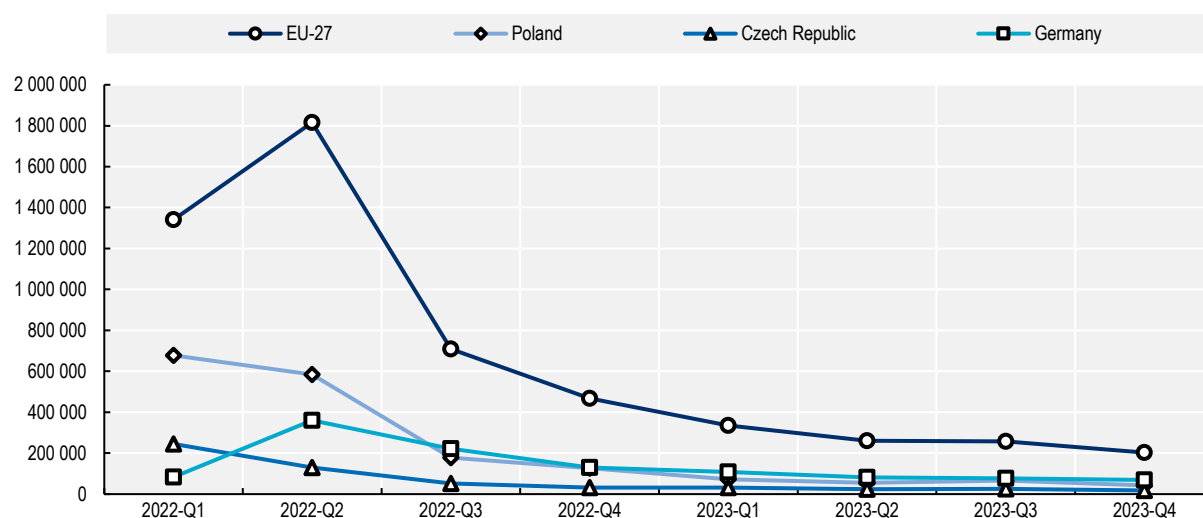
Many have also fled abroad, and as of April 2024, the number of externally displaced Ukrainians in OECD countries alone exceeded 4.9 million (Figure 1). The highest numbers are hosted in Germany, Poland, Czechia, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. While displacement from Ukraine is still ongoing, the vast majority of outflows from Ukraine took place in the first two quarters of 2022 (see examples of inflows into selected European countries in Figure 2), indicating that many Ukrainians abroad are now entering their third year of displacement.

Figure 1. Number of refugees from Ukraine recorded in OECD countries, absolute numbers and per thousand of total population, April 2024



Source: UNHCR; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; OECD Secretariat.

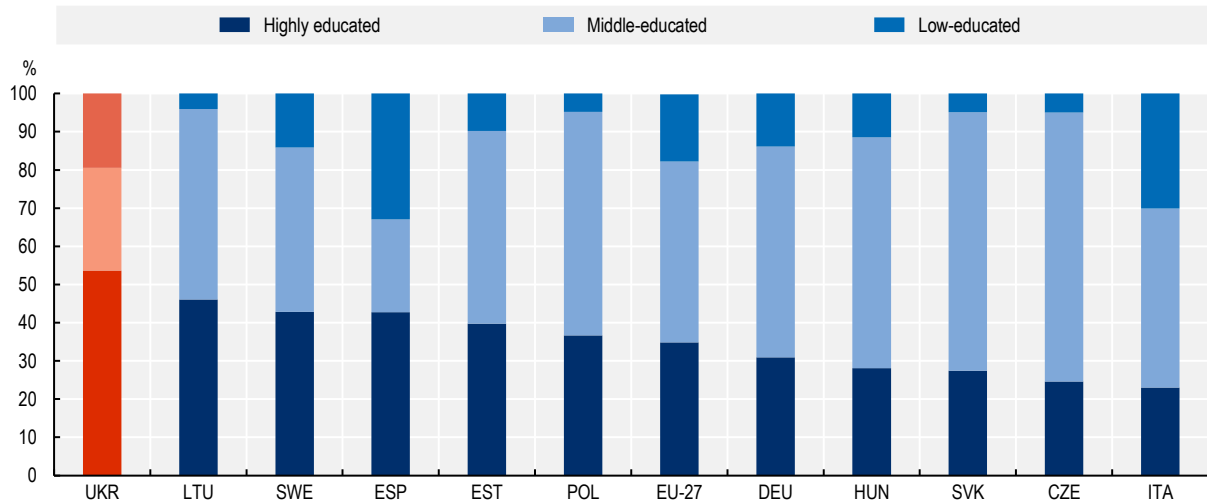
Figure 2. Decisions granting temporary protection in the EU and selected member states



Source: Eurostat.

The profiles of internally and externally displaced Ukrainians differ. Almost half of the officially registered IDPs in Ukraine are of working age, while around 21% are children and 28% are 60 or older. About 60% of IDPs are women (Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, 2024^[11]). A distinguishing characteristic of the externally displaced Ukrainians is the gender distribution. The Martial Law, in effect since 24 February 2022, prohibited most adult men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country, which is why the refugee inflows from Ukraine are comprised mainly of women, children and, to a lesser extent, elderly people. In virtually all host countries, at least 70% of adults are women and, on average, about a third of Ukrainian refugees are minors, while just around 4-6% are aged 65 and over (OECD, 2023^[4]; 2023^[5]).

Another distinguishing feature of Ukrainian forced migrants in OECD countries is the high proportion of tertiary educated (OECD, 2023^[5]). While the specific figures vary across host countries, the joint EUAA-OECD survey conducted across EU countries found that approximately two-thirds had completed tertiary education, with more than 40% of responding adults holding a Master's degree or higher (OECD/EUAA, 2024^[6]). This suggests that the educational attainment of forced migrants from Ukraine not only considerably exceeds that of other refugee groups but also that of the general Ukrainian and most host country populations (Figure 3). Among the internally displaced, about half have obtained some form of higher education (UNHCR, 2023^[7]), which is more reflective of the general Ukrainian population.

Figure 3. Educational attainment levels of the labour force in selected countries

Note: The educational classification for Ukraine is not fully comparable with ISCED-11 and comparison with the EU countries should be interpreted with caution.

Source: Ukraine LFS 2020, Eurostat 2020.

The socio-economic situation of displaced persons

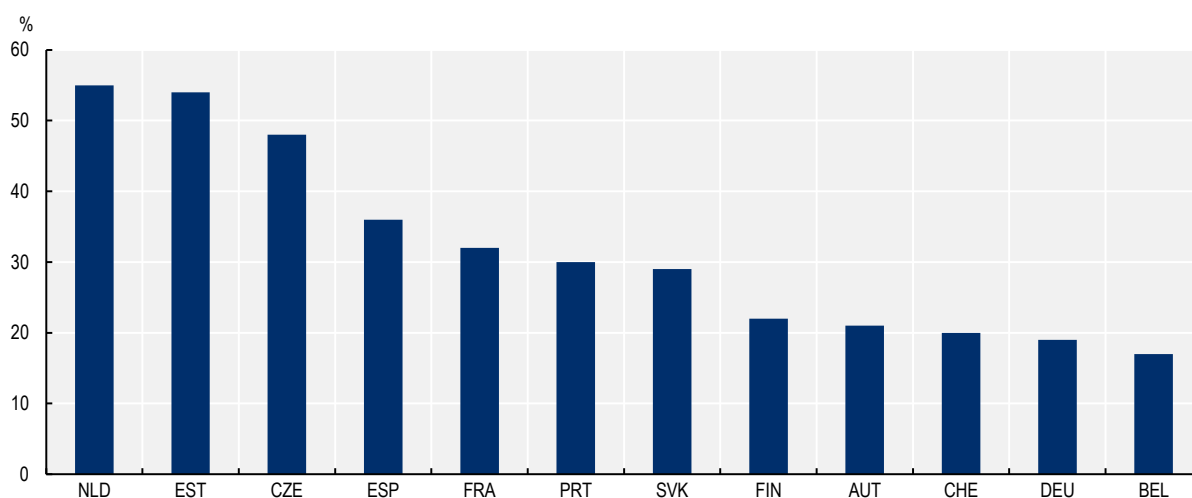
Internally displaced persons...

The labour market situation of IDPs remains daunting. IOM (2023^[8]) estimates that as of June 2023, only around 40% of working-age IDPs were employed, including 4% self-employed. The employment rate stood at 55% for men and at 34% for women. Ninety percent of IDPs who lost their employment, lost it because of the Russia's invasion. In contrast, in 2023, the estimated employment rate of Ukrainians who remained in their original places of residence stood at 50%. These numbers are also to be taken against the pre-invasion time. For example, in 2020, despite the year marked by COVID-19 pandemic, total employment rate stood at 56%, including 69% for men and 52% for women (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2021^[9]).

Externally displaced persons...

The labour market integration of Ukrainian displaced persons in OECD countries has been faster than that of other refugee groups. By the end of 2022, in some European OECD countries, the share of working-age forced migrants from Ukraine in employment had risen to over 40% (including in the Netherlands, Lithuania, Estonia and the United Kingdom (OECD, 2023^[5])). However, despite the early promising signs, employment uptake among displaced Ukrainians has slowed down, and employment rates exhibit considerable variation across countries (Figure 4). These differences arise from various factors, including disparities in overall labour market conditions, the demographic composition of Ukrainian arrivals, pre-existing migration trends, and the existence of established Ukrainian communities, among other things.

Figure 4. Estimated employment rates of displaced Ukrainians in selected European OECD countries in Q3 2023



Source: EMN/OECD (2024^[10]), "Labour market integration of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine: Joint EMN-OECD inform", <https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/Labour-market-integration-of-beneficiaries-of-temporary-protection-from-Ukraine-EMN-OECD-Inform-May-2024.pdf>.

Employment trends among displaced Ukrainians in host nations may not accurately mirror their skill profiles. Despite their above-average educational attainment, much of the job opportunities have been concentrated in low-skilled positions (OECD, 2023^[5]). Displaced Ukrainians in Europe are concentrated in accommodation and food services (I), administrative and support service activities (N), and manufacturing (C) (EMN/OECD, 2024^[10]). Skill mismatches are also prevalent, resulting in the underutilisation and potential deterioration of their existing human capital.

Yet challenges are possibly even more severe for displaced young people. The UNHCR (2023^[11]) reported that despite the large share of school-aged children among displaced Ukrainian communities, only about half of them were enrolled in schools during the 2022-23 academic year. Several OECD countries continue to observe Ukrainian parents displaying reluctance to enrol their children in host country schools. This hesitancy may stem from the expectation of an imminent return or a preference for alternative learning arrangements while awaiting stabilisation of their situation. However, given prolonged displacement, this could have enduring adverse effects on young, displaced Ukrainians. Enrolment in education systems is important for displaced children not only for their academic performance and future labour market prospects, but also for their social and emotional well-being (Cerna, 2019^[13]). Moreover, it can benefit the employment and training opportunities of parents and guardians by freeing up time otherwise spent on childcare duties (OECD, 2023^[4]).

Support is available to enhance the human capital of displaced Ukrainians

The humanitarian crisis provoked by the invasion prompted a panoply of actions, both in Ukraine and in host countries, to allow displaced persons maintain, use, and further develop their human capital, with a view to helping them cope with displacement and prepare for the evolving labour market.

Support to internally displaced persons

- **State-supported initiatives.** In April 2023, the Government of Ukraine adopted a National Strategy for State Policy Concerning Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). As part of the Action Plan to implement the Strategy, efforts have been directed towards supporting employment and enhancing the human capital capacity of IDPs. The actions aimed at the working-age population include the provision of professional training by the State Employment Service, distribution of vouchers for training opportunities through other channels, allocation of micro-grants for entrepreneurship and business development (notably supported by donors within the EU4Business programme), and provision of information about available professional training, retraining, and employment opportunities.
- **Initiatives by social partners.** Since the start of the war, social partners have been at the forefront of support for IDPs. For example, in partnership with existing VET institutions, trade unions created trade union hubs for informal professional training and micro-credentials, providing quick, free specialised training for those in need of new qualifications. Additionally, they developed a series of original training programmes and certificates tailored to the most urgent current labour market needs. Two employers' organisations have signed co-operation agreements with the hubs (Profbud, 2024^[13]).
- **Initiatives by other actors.** Numerous non-profit initiatives have emerged around the country. One such example is the Free People Employment Centre, which offers support in professional reorientation, retraining, and employment aimed at assisting IDPs, war veterans, and women. See Box 1 for other examples.

Support to externally displaced persons

- **Granting access to mainstream services in host countries.** In EU Member States that granted Temporary Protection status to Ukrainian nationals, beneficiaries gained almost immediate access to labour markets, albeit subject to applicable professional rules and national labour market policies. They also generally gained access to public employment services, which play a key role in matching job seekers to available jobs, including by providing information on available jobs and offering necessary training. European countries not bound by the Temporary Protection Directive, as well as non-EU countries such as Canada, Japan, Norway and Switzerland, have implemented their own national regulations to ensure immediate access for externally displaced Ukrainians to labour markets and public employment services (OECD, 2022^[14]). Despite the limited uptake of these services, primarily due to a lack of awareness and language barriers, they remain one of the primary options for maintaining and strengthening the human capital of externally displaced Ukrainians.
- **Granting access to services and initiatives available for diverse groups of migrants, including refugees.** Most OECD host countries offer various measures to support the socio-economic integration of migrants and refugees. Some Ukrainians have been directed to these well-established programmes (Box 1). Some support measures also transcend national boundaries. Tools such as the European Qualification Passport for Refugees and the UNESCO Qualifications Passport, initially created to address past migration crises, are now available to Ukrainian externally displaced persons (OECD, 2022^[14]).
- **Specific initiatives for externally displaced Ukrainians.** The sheer number of Ukrainians fleeing the war, as well as their specific needs, have prompted many initiatives specifically designed to support externally displaced Ukrainians. These initiatives include adopting or amending laws to facilitate Ukrainians' immediate access to the labour market, providing financial support to encourage employment in specific sectors and occupations, offering targeted language training support, matching Ukrainian refugees with employers, relaxing certain labour market restrictions, and offering training and upskilling opportunities (Eurofound, 2024^[15]; EMN/OECD, 2024^[10]). See also Box 1 for some specific examples.

Way forward: Initiatives to further improve the prospects of displaced Ukrainians

Internally displaced persons

In view of the existing efforts to enhance human capital of internally displaced Ukrainians, three key directions of additional work are identified:

- **Scaling up existing initiatives and making them sustainable.** Many initiatives have been created thanks to emergency funding from various donor institutions. As the invasion continues, there is a need to transition to longer-term financing solutions to sustain and expand successful initiatives rather than initiating similar activities from scratch and operating on a one-off basis.
- **Effective co-ordination among various stakeholders.** Given the panoply of initiatives, ensuring co-ordination among various stakeholders, including donors, identifying gaps and promoting synergies, while aligning these efforts with Ukraine's recovery needs becomes critical.

Information sharing and improving access. Awareness about existing support programmes is also essential. Individuals in small towns and villages do not know about programmes in larger cities or do not have access to them. The inability to undergo reskilling and retraining negatively impacts their labour market integration, potentially leading to re-displacement or to premature return, which further exacerbates vulnerabilities.

Box 1. Examples of programmes and initiatives aimed at enhancing the skills and capabilities of Ukrainians

Mounting evidence suggests that individuals displaced by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine require support measures to facilitate their socio-economic integration already during their prolonged displacement, not just upon their return and reintegration. These measures should focus on enhancing their human capital, thereby improving their socio-economic situation and prospects, regardless of their location.

In Ukraine...

Numerous existing programmes are oriented towards new skill needs of Ukraine in general, and many address the needs of internally displaced Ukrainians. One example is the Skills4Recovery programme, funded by Germany, seeking to boost skilled workforce availability in the key sectors for Ukraine's recovery. It aims to enhance vocational education and training (VET) conditions through various measures, including training VET teachers to better support vulnerable groups like veterans and IDP. The project, run in co-ordination with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Economy, is active in six regional administrations (Lviv, Vinnytsia, Kyiv, Chernivtsi, Poltava, and Dnipro) and supports 20 educational providers nationwide, including vocational schools and training centres. Moving forward, Germany seeks to collaborate with the European Union and specific member states under the Team Europe Initiative to streamline, synchronise, and scale up the support provided by different partners, aiming to enhance Ukraine's human capital more effectively.

Within the UNDP Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme, funded by the Government of Germany and the European Union, a network of 30 Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions in 20 cities across six Ukrainian regions was created, to mobilise 57 mentors from 50 enterprises. In 2023, there were 506 participants in the programme, of whom 21% were IDP. The participants gained new skills in 23 different professions and 65% of the graduates secured new employment. In 2024, the programme will expand to include capacity building for VET and supplementary educational services (SES) management, personnel, and teaching staff; equipping regional SES and continuing VET offices; rehabilitation and provision of the equipment for VET schools; re-training and apprenticeship campaigns, among other activities.

In host countries...

Some externally displaced Ukrainians have been able to benefit from existing reskilling and upskilling measures available for broader migrant and refugee groups in host countries. Examples include:

- In France, the *Passerelle* programme streamlines the enrolment process for refugee students, allowing them to first focus on language studies, familiarise themselves with the university system, and access orientation services before pursuing tertiary education. Meanwhile, the *PAUSE* programme, jointly operated by the French Government, civil society, and the private sector, assists researchers and artists in exile and was promptly accessible to Ukrainians escaping the war.
- In Germany, MY TURN programme is designed to assist immigrant women and native-born women with migrant parents to gain qualifications, training, and employment with social security contributions. It provides personalised guidance and assistance regarding balancing family commitments with work responsibilities, along with support in securing internships and employment opportunities.
- In Italy, the ESF-funded PUOI project is assisting vulnerable migrants, including displaced individuals from Ukraine (comprising about 16% of participants in the current phase), in accessing the labour market through tailored job orientation and other supplementary support measures, as well as participation in a six-month internship.

Both in Ukraine or in host countries...

Several training initiatives have focused specifically on the needs of **displaced Ukrainian women**. Examples include:

- Initiative by the Projector Institute, a Ukrainian EdTech company, together with the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, Diia. Business and the UNDP, started in 2022, through which these partners committed to retraining 5 000 displaced Ukrainian women to pursue new careers in creative and technological fields. The focus has been particularly on jobs that can be easily done remotely.
- “Dream & Achieve”, an intensive training programme for displaced Ukrainian women, led by the Ukrainian NGO Impact Force in collaboration with UN Women and funded by Austria and Japan. It consists of 11 comprehensive modules covering various areas such as digital marketing, business strategy, and the development of sustainable, socially responsible business models. Additionally, the programme provides mentorship and fosters community building among displaced women.
- Reskilling Ukraine project run by the Skill Shift Initiative, in partnership with Scania, funded by the Swedish Government. Since the beginning of 2024, it trained and accompanied in their career transition over 300 female participants.
- In October 2023, UNITAR launched a training programme “Bolstering livelihoods: Digital reskilling for Ukrainian women evacuees in Poland”, funded by Japan. The six-month hybrid programme provided training for about 500 women in high-demand digital skills to increase employment and income-generating potential as well as guide participants on developing socially responsible digital start-ups and build leadership and entrepreneurial skills to drive change and innovation.

Another essential target group for training initiatives is **Ukrainian young displaced adults**:

- In Czechia, UNICEF has launched the CESTY Initiative, a multi-stakeholder partnership designed to support displaced Ukrainian youth to engage in one of three skills-building pathways: (1) paid internships and apprenticeships; (2) low-skilled labour which supports

access to professional development opportunities and language acquisition; or (3) scholarships which cover basic needs while youth study full-time. The project collaborates with the private sector to connect 1 500 displaced Ukrainian youth with these opportunities in 2024. UNICEF is looking to expand this initiative to other host countries, through a regional Pathways Initiative.

- In Poland, Care International, Tent Partnership for Refugees, and UNICEF together with the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy are cooperating on an initiative for the employment of displaced people from Ukraine in Poland in accordance with their qualifications, improvement of skills and retraining.

Externally displaced persons

By December 2023, nearly 4.5 million Ukrainians are estimated to have returned to their habitual residence, whether from abroad or from internal displacement within Ukraine (IOM, 2023^[2]). The rate of return was the highest over the summer 2022 but has slowed down since then.

The majority of those who remain displaced abroad continue to express a wish to return to Ukraine (OECD/EUAA, 2024^[6]). The State of Ukraine has expressed a strong wish and need for their return as well. However, it is becoming clear that for most of them, return is likely to follow an extended period of displacement. Consequently, host countries and Ukraine should implement additional support measures to ensure the socio-economic integration of displaced Ukrainians in receiving countries, preserving and even enhancing their human capital, yet allowing them to return when the time is right.

Considering these conflicting objectives, **adopting a dual-intent approach to inclusion** could prepare for indefinite stay without jeopardizing the aim to return. It achieves this by ensuring that investments in human capital and inclusion support are balanced with deliberate steps to minimise potential barriers to return in both host countries and Ukraine (OECD, 2023^[16]).

The success of dual intent entails establishing an unprecedented level of co-operation between host countries and Ukraine. At least five promising and interconnected ways in which countries could implement dual intent can be highlighted (OECD, 2023^[16]).

- First, it is essential for host countries and Ukraine to **invest in the human capital development of Ukrainian displaced persons during their displacement**. Alongside retaining and building upon the existing skills, preference should be given to supporting skills, know-how and work experience in sectors that are essential for the recovery of Ukraine, such as construction, engineering, energy, health, IT and support for the green transition. Many of the same skills are in high demand in current host countries, creating economic opportunities for displaced Ukrainians regardless of their future location. In 2022 and in 2023, Ukraine's State Employment Service conducted Employers Needs Survey among 8 000 and 33 000 Ukrainian enterprises, respectively, to inquire about their specific skill needs. The results of the surveys could be shared with the State Employment Services in host countries to better-tailor career guidance and professional orientation for externally displaced Ukrainians hoping to return to Ukraine following the war.
- Second, Ukraine and host countries need to work together to **streamline the recognition of skills and qualifications** on both sides. This would support skills-appropriate labour market entry in current host countries but also prepares for the transfer of newly acquired skills and know-how upon return to Ukraine. Ukraine has signed several bilateral international agreements for recognition and/or establishing equivalence of diplomas and qualifications with several countries. In Europe this includes Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic. Ukraine currently progresses towards aligning its National Qualification Framework with the European Qualification framework, but this is unlikely to happen before 2027. In parallel, other bilateral agreements, including with countries outside of Europe, could be envisaged.

- Third, it is important to **offer Ukrainian language training in host countries for children and young adults** to ensure that they have the necessary language skills and cultural ties after a prolonged period of displacement to return and reintegrate.
- Fourth, host countries and Ukraine need to co-operate to **retain and facilitate Ukrainians' financial and digital ties with their home country**. While many Ukrainians abroad have incomes from Ukraine, including from telework for enterprises based in Ukraine, it is necessary to address the challenges related to tax and social security obligations. In view of extended stay abroad, the issue of portability of pensions across countries should also be addressed. Other measures may include easing small-scale investment flows, lowering costs of money transfers and of mobile operations. The existing Ukrainian e-government infrastructure, including the Diia app, could offer a unique way for Ukraine to stay connected with their displaced communities and also help prepare return, for example by extending the State Employment Services to Ukrainians abroad. Ukrainian consulates abroad should also have labour market, tax, and education experts to provide guidance to Ukrainians considering return.
- Fifth, further co-operation is needed by affected parties to **build a legal framework for regular migration to ensure mobility pathways for Ukrainians following the war**, including skills mobility partnerships. After the war, externally displaced Ukrainians are likely to have conflicting aspirations in between supporting Ukraine's recovery and maintaining ties to host societies where they have rebuilt their lives. Individuals can be expected to be less willing to return if they believe there is no possibility to remigrate. Meanwhile, individuals who remained in Ukraine may be considering temporary opportunities abroad to access higher income and better training prospects. Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs), featuring co-operation between states, employers, and workers, could serve as a valuable tool in facilitating such mobility in a manner that could contribute to the expansion of the skills base in Ukraine.

What are the key considerations for policy makers?

In view of the above, a strategic commitment is needed from various partners within and outside Ukraine to support the enhancement of human capital of displaced Ukrainians, with the objective to contribute to recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine. Such commitments, both political and financial, can take the form of a multi-stakeholder Skills Alliance for Ukraine, such as the one proposed at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin in 2024.

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